

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSM-03 IO-13 ACDA-07 CIAE-00
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R 190914Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3158
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
USLO RIYADH

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3168

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SY, SA
SUBJECT: DAWALIBI'S DISCUSSION WITH PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD

REF: (A) JIDDA 3485, (B) DAMASCUS 2999

1. MFA AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR SHOUIFI GAVE US READOUT ON PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD'S LENGTHY SESSION WITH SYRIAN EXILE MA'AROUF DAWALIBI. ACCORDING TO SHOUIFI, DAWALIBI HAS VISITED SYRIA ON TWO RECENT OCCASIONS, FIRST IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS FATHER DIED AND THEN AGAIN TO COMMEMORATE THE FORTIETH DAY AFTER HIS FATHER'S DEATH. DAWALIBI WAS ACCOMPANIED BY ANOTHER PROMINENT FORMER POLITICIAN CURRENTLY RESIDING IN SAUDI ARABIA, RUSHDI AL-KHIKHA. DURING ONE OF THESE VISITS, DAWALIBI MET FOR NEARLY TWO HOURS WITH ASSAD, AND AFTERWARDS BRIEFED SHOUIFI ON CONTENT OF DISCUSSIONS.

2. SHOUIFI SAID ASSAD SPENT NEARLY FIRST HOUR-AND-HALF
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REVIEWING HIS REGIME'S ACHIEVEMENTS. ASSAD THEN SAID HE WAS READY TO COOPERATE WITH DAWALIBI, A PROPOSAL WHICH LATTER CLAIMED HE IGNORED. ASSAD THEN ASKED FOR DAWALIBI'S ASSISTANCE IN PERSUADING THE SAUDIS TO RESTORE FINANCIAL AID TO SYRIA. DAWALIBI REPLIED BY REVIEWING SAUDI POLITICAL SYSTEM AND APPROACH TO FOREIGN AID, GIST OF WHICH CONSISTED OF DAWALIBI'S ASSERTION THAT THESE MATTERS WERE DECIDED

BY KEY MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY MEETING TOGETHER AND IN PRIVATE, AND THAT OUTSIDERS SUCH AS HIMSELF HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON THESE PROCEEDINGS.

3. SHOEFI ADDED THAT DAWALIBI AND KHIKHA WERE NOT THE ONLY SYRIAN EXILES WHO HAVE SOME ACCESS TO SAUDI ROYAL FAMILY. HE SAID THAT SALAH AL-BITAR AND JALAL AL-SAYYID, BOTH OF WHOM HELPED FOUND BAATH PARTY, HAD BEEN RECEIVED EARLIER BY PRINCE FAHD. SHOEFI COMMENTED THAT HE COULD NOT FULLY EXPLAIN SAUDI POSITION TOWARD SYRIA, IN TERMS OF WITHHOLDING FINANCIAL AID AND RECEIVING SYRIAN EXILES, BUT HE BELIEVED THAT ISSUE OF ME SETTLEMENT WAS TAKEN EXTREMELY SERIOUSLY IN RIYADH AND HE SPECULATED SAUDIS MAY HAVE SOME DOUBTS THAT PEACE AGREEMENT SIGNED BY MINORITY ALAWITE REGIME WOULD BE DURABLE.

4. COMMENT: ASSAD-DAWALIBI MEETING IS ANOTHER INDICATION OF THE EFFECT WHICH ABSENCE OF SAUDI FUNDING IN 1977 IS HAVING ON SARG. WE SUSPECT THAT DAWALIBI WILL BE FREQUENT VISITOR TO SYRIA FOLLOWING HIS RECEPTION BY THE PRESIDENT. TO THE EXTENT THAT HE HAS ANY REMAINING ACCESS TO SAUDI LEADERS, HE MAY WELL USE IT TO DEPICT ASSAD REGIME IN NEGATIVE FASHION.
MURPHY

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